

Food Waste: Turning Trash Into Dinner

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Six RDs reveal their culinary secrets for doctoring up leftovers to avoid food waste.

According to the USDA, Americans waste more than 130 billion lbs of food annually.¹ This food waste becomes trash that gets carted to landfills, producing methane gas, which is more disastrous to the environment than the carbon emissions released when driving a car. And, as people throw away this food, 1 out of 6 folks in this country goes to bed hungry.²

While many people may want to blame farmers, food producers, and food retailers for the problem of food waste, the fact is the majority of individuals in the farm-to-table continuum are aggressively working to reduce food waste.^{3,4} They're not in the business of producing food that can't be sold. It isn't good for their bottom line.

So if Americans need to point a finger at the biggest culprit in wasting food, they may need to look in the mirror. According to ReFED, a nonprofit organization against food waste in the United States, American households are huge food waste offenders, more so than farmers and food processors combined.⁵ Yet ironically, sustainability currently is a buzzword influencing more than 85% of consumers' values, attitudes, and actions, according to research by The Hartman Group. Here lies a major disconnect but also a wonderful opportunity for RDs.

Diet and nutrition educators and communicators have the ability to become public influencers, especially on social media, by promoting that food waste isn't sustainable for either the planet or our neighbors. Dietitians should be motivating the public to stop wasting food by turning overripe lemons into lemon zest, as the saying goes. Let's challenge each other to start role modeling about how we recycle, reuse, and repurpose what's in our kitchens to inspire the same in consumers.

To get the momentum going, I reached out to my colleagues to inquire how they reduce food waste in their own kitchens.

Ellie Krieger, MS, RD**Host of *Ellie's Real Good Food* on public television and award-winning cookbook author**

"Hash the trash and put an egg on it," Krieger says; she chops leftover bits of cooked vegetables (especially onions), grains, beans, meat, or seafood, and then sautés them in a skillet before transferring the hash to a plate. She then cooks an egg in the same skillet to top off the "hash of trash." The hash gives leftovers a second life as a crisp, browned, flavorful base, and serves as a bed for an over-easy egg. It's the ultimate in savory comfort food with little cleanup, she says.

Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RD, FAND**Founder and president of Farmer's Daughter Consulting, Inc.**

Myrdal Miller, whose father was a farmer, is the queen of refrigerator recycling when it comes to making soup, hot or cold, from vegetables that have lived past their prime. She searches the veggie bin for treasures such as tomatoes, cucumbers, shishito or padron peppers, avocados, bell peppers, and zucchini, and throws them all in a blender along with herbs such as basil and parsley, a tad of extra virgin olive oil, vinegar or lime juice, and salt. This concoction makes a savory nutrient powerhouse for a cold or hot (reheat it) soup for lunch, Myrdal Miller says. She does the same with fresh fruit to make smoothies for breakfast. "Wasting food shows no respect for the hard work that goes into producing food," Myrdal Miller says.

Kara Lydon, RD, LDN, RYT**Owner of Kara Lydon Nutrition and *The Foodie Dietitian Blog***

Lydon recommends saving the greens from root vegetables such as carrots, beets, or radishes, as they can be chopped and added to a variety of dishes, including pesto, tabbouleh, salads, and soups, or simply sautéed with oil and garlic as a side dish. Carrot and radish greens will add a peppery flavor, similar to parsley and arugula, while beet greens provide a sweet addition to any dish. All three greens add an earthy flavor—along with antioxidants; phytonutrients; vitamins A, C, and K; and potassium—to any dish.

Kara Cucinotta, MS, RD, CNSC, LDN**An associate professor at Johnson & Wales University**

Instead of throwing away overly ripe, brown, mushy bananas, Cucinotta places them in freezer bags and puts them in her freezer. They will last for a few months in the freezer and add a touch of creamy sweetness without relying on added sugars when mixed into smoothies, oatmeal, pudding, and plain yogurt. She also uses them as ingredients for whole wheat pancakes and waffle and muffin mixes to add moisture and nutrients such as potassium, and phytonutrients including catechins, kaempferol, and proanthocyanidins.

Cindy Kleckner, RDN, LD, FAND**Coauthor of *Hypertension Cookbook for Dummies* and *DASH Diet for Dummies***

"Repurpose on purpose" is Kleckner's motto. She grills or roasts large pans of a variety of

cut-up vegetables drizzled with a little balsamic vinaigrette to add a nutritious and flavorful side dish to dinner. The leftovers are repurposed in a marinara sauce to make it taste meatier, sandwiched into a hummus wrap to add bulk, sprinkled on top of a premade pizza crust with sauce to add intense flavor, or added to an omelet, frittata, or quiche for a veggie- and protein-packed breakfast.

Abbie Gellman, MS, RD, CDN

A New York–based chef, dietitian, and owner of Culinary Nutrition Cuisine

If Gellman sees a spot that’s rotting on any tomato, zucchini, potato, or onion, she grabs her knife, carefully chisels away the blemish, and saves the rest of the edible portion. She immediately tosses these postsurgical veggies into a pot or slow cooker with some stock, a can of drained beans, and dried herbs to make a high-fiber soup that lasts all week or in the freezer for up to six months. A mug of this vitamin-packed soup helps her consume her minimum of two cups of vegetables daily.

Please continue the momentum and become role models and social media influencers by showing clients, patients, and the public at large how you turn your food trash into dinner to cut back on food waste.

— *Joan Salge Blake, EdD, MS, RDN, LDN, FAND, is a nutrition professor at Boston University and the host of the hit health and wellness podcast **SpotOn!**, available on all major podcast platforms including Apple, Spotify, and Stitcher.*

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